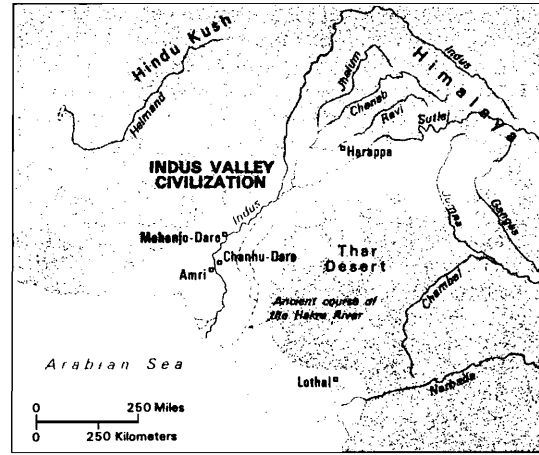


**Indus Valley civilization** was one of the world's first great civilizations. The civilization began to flourish about 4,500 years ago and was centered in the vast river plains of what are now Pakistan and northwestern India. This civilization is sometimes called the *Harappan civilization*. It is named after the Pakistani town of Harappa, where archaeologists first discovered evidence of the culture.

**Development of the Indus civilization.** The Indus civilization developed out of farming and herding communities that carried on trade with each other. About 2500 B.C., the communities became more unified culturally, and in some places people began laying out carefully planned cities. In time, the Indus civilization grew to cover most of present-day Pakistan and parts of what are now Afghanistan and northern India. The heart of the civilization was the vast flood plain of the Indus and Hakra rivers. The Hakra River (also known as the Ghaggar River or Sarasvati River) is now dried up. It once flowed east of—and parallel to—the Indus River, in what are now India and Pakistan. The civilization developed a standardized system of weights and measures and a system of writing that used pictographs (simple drawings representing words).

In the early 1800's, British scholars learned that people had found ancient artifacts buried in huge earthen mounds in the region. But it was not until the 1920's that archaeologists began excavating these sites and realized that they contained the remains of cities from a previously unknown civilization. Hundreds of Indus sites have been found.

**Indus culture.** The Indus people planned their cities carefully. They built many of their buildings on mud-brick platforms that protected the buildings from seasonal floods. Houses were made of baked or sun-dried



The Indus Valley civilization was centered in the river plains of what is now Pakistan and northwestern India.

brick. Many houses had two stories. Most homes had a bathing area that was supplied with water from a nearby public well or from a well in the courtyard of the house. In larger communities, each house was connected to an elaborate city-wide drainage system. Other structures include large buildings that may have been used for storing grain and for other purposes.

The Indus people traded extensively with one another. City people traded with nearby agricultural communities and with distant mining and other areas. Goods traded probably included cotton, lumber, grain, and livestock. For transport, people used pack animals, river boats, and ox carts. The Indus people also traded with other civilizations, including cultures in central Asia and Mesopotamia and along the Persian Gulf.

Indus artisans produced a variety of useful and decorative objects. They used copper and bronze to make tools, mirrors, pots, and pans. Bone, shell, and ivory were used to create ornaments, tools, game pieces, and inlay for furniture. Indus artisans also crafted silver and gold utensils and ornaments, as well as ornaments

**Ruins of the Indus Valley civilization** have been uncovered at Mohenjo-Daro, Pakistan. In the ruins, archaeologists have found many stone seals carved with the figures of animals, *left*. The large, brick-lined depression at the right may have served as a public or ritual bathing area.

Karachi Museum, Pakistan (Art Resource)

U.C. Berkeley Expedition to Harappa and the Govt. of Pakistan Department of Archaeology and Museums (J. M. Kenoyer)



made of stoneware and earthenware. Indus sculptors made clay figurines of animals and people, probably for use in religious rituals. They also made small limestone figures that may represent gods or important people.

The most unusual objects found at Indus sites include square stone seals engraved with pictographs and drawings of animals. Pictographs have also been found on Indus pottery and other objects. However, scholars have been unable to decipher what the writings mean. The Indus people buried their dead, often in wooden coffins along with pottery vessels.

**Decline of the Indus civilization.** By 1700 B.C., the Indus civilization had gradually broken up into smaller cultures, called *late Harappan cultures* and *post-Harappan cultures*. The breakup was partly caused by changing river patterns. These changes included the drying up of the Hakra River and changes in the course of the Indus River. The river changes disrupted agricultural and economic systems, and many people left the cities of the Indus Valley region. However, some aspects of Indus art, agriculture, and possibly social organization continued in the smaller cultures. Some of these aspects became incorporated into a unified urban civilization that began developing throughout the region about 600 B.C.

Jonathan Mark Kenoyer

See also **Sculpture** (The beginnings [Indus Valley]); **World, History of the** (Early centers of civilization [The Indus Valley]).